

PRESERVING THE PAST



Food was definitely a family affair for me. My parents weren't chefs, but I was surrounded by great cooks. My grandparents had a 90-acre farm, where they grew corn, watermelon and cantaloupes that always graced the table. My Uncle Bobby owned a butcher shop, where they slaughtered pigs, and processed bologna and other country goodies. Even to this day, we still enter through the back door so my daughter can see the meat hanging—just like it was when I was a kid. She sees the product hanging there

and now it's associated with the food we eat, not just the Styrofoam container it's in when bought at the store. Until 10 years ago, I took that kind of food experience for granted.

My dad's love of food shaped my food culture. When I was as young as five years old, we'd go deer hunting. I was involved in the whole process and became very aware of where my food came from. It was living, it's dead, now it's dinner. That's my upbringing. We would smoke the meats, or cook venison to preserve it. I went off to college with glass jars of venison my mother canned from my dad's hunts that year.

I wasn't good at math or history in school, but I always wanted to be doing something. So my mother suggested I go to Columbia-Montour AVTS for its culinary program. Immediately following graduation, I went straight to Johnson & Wales in Charleston and completed my associate's degree in 10 months. I always felt that gravitational pull towards food, so this was a natural fit. Thank God for mom pushing me in that direction. I learned you can really enjoy your life while doing something you love.

In 2006, we set out to improve the meats we served and do something to make us stand out as a restaurant that had higher quality products. We wanted to have great steaks that were locally sourced and pasture-raised, and offer other unique cuts. We had local farmers raising pigs, cows and lambs for us—then delivering to our back door. We became better butchers and served better steaks.

That meant we had all this meat

leftover, so we started making sausages, salami and other dry meats. The years 2007 through 2009 were about perfecting our recipes. By 2009, we had enough product that we were able to start Artisan Meat Share as a CSA, kind of an underground salumi society. I took the idea from Chris Cosentino and Incanto—it was such a cool idea. Our customers told their friends and charcuterie became a big part of our menu at Cypress. We felt the challenge to do something else.

When we decided to open Artisan Meat Share as a storefront, I wanted to make it a hub for artisan products, like an old neighborhood butcher shop that also sells snack sticks, beef jerky, jams, jellies, condiments. But also an American redneck junk food joint; that's what I remember about the country store when I was growing up. We make Lebanon bologna, New Jersey-style pork roll, scrapple. A killer ham. We've explored selling pastrami made from pork belly. But sandwiches are our gateway drug. Everybody loves a good sandwich, so we get them to try some with finely emulsified sausages or different deli meats.

I'm really proud of what we make; everything is so different from what you get at the grocery store. It takes a while to perfect the product, but you can taste the difference. A little bit of good quality goes a long way. You can just tell.

Craig Deihl is the chef of Artisan Meat Share and Cypress, Charleston, S.C., and the author of *Cypress* (Gibbs Smith, 2007).